

Area Member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee urges VA to report on steps taken to protect veterans at Philadelphia Veterans Hospital and across country

Washington DC - Congressman John Adler, a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, called on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today to provide Congress with a report on the medical mistakes found at the Philadelphia VA and an update on the steps being taken to increase oversight throughout the department. Following up on a letter sent to Secretary Eric Shinseki on August 24, Congressman Adler urged the VA to increase oversight and transparency immediately.

"The VA needs to do a better job for our veterans at the Philadelphia VA and across the country," Congressman Adler said. "We have been waiting for too long for answers. Our veterans deserve the best medical care available, and these types of errors must be prevented in the future."

Following the July 22 House Committee on Veterans' Affairs' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing on the suspended brachytherapy program at the Philadelphia VA Hospital, Congressman Adler introduced legislation that seeks to remedy the glaring lack of oversight that existed in the program at the Philadelphia VA.

Today, Congressman Adler once again called for a full and complete accounting of the errors that occurred in the Philadelphia VA's brachytherapy program. In addition, he requested a status update on the VA's progress in conducting a system wide evaluation and implementing measures to increase oversight and accountability at the agency.

The Philadelphia VA serves more than eight counties in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Congressman Adler represents more than 60,000 veterans, including residents of Burlington and Camden County who seek medical treatment regularly at the Philadelphia VA Hospital.

The complete text of the letter sent to Secretary Shinseki follows.

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I am following up on a letter I sent to your attention on August 24, 2009, regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts to ensure that the problems that occurred in the brachytherapy program at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center are not repeated elsewhere in the VA Health System. As of this date, I have received no response to my inquiries.

Specifically, I asked that your office provide a full and complete accounting of the errors that occurred in the Philadelphia VA's brachytherapy program, as the number of medical events (as that term is defined by the NRC) has risen since the VA suspended the program.

Also, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing on July 22, 2009, entitled, "Enforcement of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Brachytherapy Program Safety Standards." At that hearing, Joseph A. Williams, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, outlined three (3) reform measures the VA will be implementing to ensure that the problems of the brachytherapy program in Philadelphia are not repeated elsewhere in the VA healthcare system. I requested a status update on the implementation of these measures in my August 24, 2009 letter and have not yet received a response. Please provide this information in a timely manner.

My August 24th letter also urged the VA to take a more active role in the supervision of independent contractors and conduct a system wide evaluation of all of the low volume programs in the VA's health care system. Please provide a status update regarding these efforts.

I have introduced legislation in the House of Representatives that would require the VA to conduct an evaluation of all of the low-volume programs that are currently operating in its medical facilities to ensure that they are meeting their safety standards and to report their findings annually to Congress. My bill would also seek to impose stricter requirements on the VA before they are allowed to extend a contract with an independent contractor. This requirement will increase oversight and supervision over these independent contractors.

Even though I have introduced this remedial legislation, I understand that this needs to be a

collaborative effort. Many veterans in my congressional district visit the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. It is imperative that this facility provides the highest quality of care for our most deserving citizens. I look forward to your response and to working with you in the future to protect the health and safety of our veterans.

Sincerely,
John Adler
Member of Congress